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Carson Seeks to Close Methamphetamine “Blister Pack Loophole”

*Carson Co-Sponsors Legislation to limit sale of products used
to manufacture Meth*

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Washington, D.C. - Eastern Oklahoma Congressman Brad Carson (D-OK) announced today that he is co-sponsoring the “Methamphetamine Blister Pack Loophole Elimination Act of 2004,” HR 3789. This legislation would close a loophole that allows illegal drug producers to purchase large quantities of the cold and allergy drug pseudoephedrine, which is often used to make methamphetamine, in blister packs. HR 3789 would simply close the loophole that allows individuals to purchase unlimited quantities of pseudoephedrine in blister packs. Federal law currently restricts the amount of pseudoephedrine individuals may purchase when sold as loose pills in bottles, but does not apply to blister packs.

“The methamphetamine problem has skyrocketed throughout the United States and particularly in Oklahoma in the past few years,” said Congressman Carson. “Oklahoma is currently the top producer of methamphetamine per capita in the entire United States. This dangerous and destructive drug has a negative impact on the health and safety of everyone in the community. That is why I am doing everything in my power to fight this epidemic. According to the DEA, closing the blister pack loophole is the single best thing we can do right now to help them in their fight against methamphetamine.”

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HR 3789 directly follows United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) recommendations as set out in a 2002 report based on a study commissioned by Congress in 1999. This legislation would make it more difficult for meth dealers to get the pseudoephedrine products necessary to make the drug.

In order to make methamphetamine producers combine a variety of precursor drugs. Such precursor drugs range from very difficult to obtain to readily available items such as pseudoephedrine, which is found in common cold and flu medications in almost every supermarket, pharmacy, and convenience store.

Since pseudoephedrine is so easy to obtain, Congress limited the amount that individuals may purchase. In 1996 Congress placed a 24-gram limit, which equals almost 1,000 pills. Later the limit was reduced to 9 grams or approximately 366 30-milligram pills. Individuals wishing to purchase more at one time are required to provide their name and address to the store. To avoid confusion by employees, most stores simply limit the purchase to the 9-gram limit. However, despite these limits, one important loophole remains. The purchase limit currently only applies to loose pills in bottles, but blister packs are the most common form of packaging for pseudoephedrine products.

The loophole exists because many previously thought that meth dealers would not take the time to use blister-packed products. However, the DEA study provides clear and convincing evidence that blister packs make up a significant percent of pseudoephedrine at lab sites. Meth dealers use varying methods for removing the pills from blister packs, from sophisticated machines to forcing children to pop out the pills by hand.

Based on the information and recommendations of the DEA, this bill would effectively close the blister pack loophole and extend the current 9-gram retail sales limit to blister packed products. According to the DEA, this is the single best thing we can do to assist them in the fight against methamphetamine. This legislation would not negatively impact the ability of pharmaceutical manufacturers to make legitimate profits. Nor would the legislation burden consumers because the 9-gram limit equals 366 pills or approximately 30 packages of 12 pills or 15 packages of 24 pills.

“Although this legislation will not single-handedly solve the meth problem, it is an essential step on the road to again making our communities safe from this terrible and destructive drug,” stated Carson. “I am very pleased that the Oklahoma State Legislature is also taking steps to further limit the sale and distribution of pseudoephedrine through House Bill 21676, named in Honor of Troopers Green, Evans, and Eales. I encourage the members of the legislature to quickly pass this important legislation so it can make it to Governor Henry’s desk as soon as possible.

“Additionally, by closing the blister pack loophole, HR 3789 will help protect Oklahoma and in particular, its border counties where meth dealers can easily cross state lines to purchase pseudoephedrine.”

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